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AN AWAKENING

ADDRESS

Delivered at Allenhurst, New Jersey, July 4, 1911

upon the occasion of the

ANNUAL MEETING

of the

Society of the Cincinnati in the State of New Jersey

by

THE HON. WILLIAM PENNINGTON

Vice-President of the Society

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ADDRESS

—BY—

Hon. William Pennington

The Society of the Cincinnati was instituted directly after the close of the war of the Revolution by the Officers of the Continental Army. The truth of that statement is the absolute foundation of this organization, the original of all patriotic societies, and the base upon which subsequent orders of a like nature have since been reared. It is well that not only members of the Cincinnati, who should need no emphatic reminders of this, but those belonging to kindred societies be impressed with a fact of such supreme importance. Let us consider for a moment what all this means; a war undertaken to right wrongs that cried aloud in their extreme injustice for remedy or abolition; a war that ultimately became a struggle for absolute freedom of individual and institution, and in its ultimate result brought into existence the greatest Republic upon this earth, had just come to a close. The English possessions known as the American Colonies were now freed from the overbearing and insolent domination of Great Britain's King and Ministry, and belonged to the liberty-loving people whose cause had triumped along with their victorious armies. These armies were at the outset of the struggle motley aggregations, grotesque, one might say, if such a word could be applied to that which was so noble in motive and exalted in incentive as this citizen army that found itself in pitiful array against the trained soldiers of His Majesty King George III, in the year A. D. 1776. Is it possible for us in this advanced day and generation to realize what living in these wonderful times meant? Can you imagine what the daily life of an active patriotic man must have been then? The terrific importance of a combat at arms wherein the physical odds were so painfully against the

success of the principles involved must have so taken possession of the hearts and brains of the patriots of that day, that they literally and absolutely resolved to die; to give up their lives in real earnest fact ere they would falter or bend the knee in surrender of either individual or principle. We talk and read lightly about sacrifices, the giving of life for life, in ancient and in current affairs, but do we Americans living now ever put ourselves in the place of these founders and heroes of one hundred and thirty-five years ago and grant to their memories in silence and in awe their meed of reverence. In the hurly-burly of to-day we fail to recall as often as would be for our own good these facts, that this nation, one of the greatest in existence, is but a baby in years as Empires are reckoned, and all that we see about us—that which compels a world-wide wonder and admiration, had its inception and inspiration in those first rude struggles between the farm hands and defenders of their rural homes with scarlet-coated soldiers from across the sea, and rising like incense from the smoke of these early unequal conflicts has come the apotheosis of power, dignity, wealth and independence, which today we call with pride the United States of America. But what could those earnest, loyal, liberty-loving men accomplish, unofficered and undisciplined? Could courage unfostered and unhusbanded accomplish aught without hardship and a dominant directing will? And so even as the householders rushed to arms and filled the ranks, rare souls with the Divine gift of command took their exalted stations at the head of these untried troops and the war went on through alternate elation and depression, but always with a dogged determination, to its triumphal close.

At the time of these soul-stirring happenings, and under these rare conditions, the Society of the Cincinnati came into being. Can you imagine a more responsible heritage than you as a member of this Society possess? Linked by ties the most sacred in life's experience, you were by an inversion of inheritance represented in that

famous gathering at the Verplanck House, whereat the Society was formally organized; your ancestor, whatever his rank, spoke at that time for you through his representatives in that assembly, and pledged you to a faithful fulfilment of the duties of this choice brotherhood. What do you think was uppermost in the minds of these great men when they came to realize the importance of these principles? I believe they saw in the long vista of the future a nucleus for such love of country and mystic binding together their posterity in a hallowed fraternity ever deepening, no matter whether the actual membership increased or fell away, as would exert a positive and incalculable influence for good upon the destinies of their country, and they had the belief because they could not find it in their hearts to doubt, that a strong reciprocal sentiment would bind close together for all time as nothing else could, this one Society of Friends. See what was given to us to treasure and emphasize; a permanent membership for our posterity in an organization whose founders were also the founders of the Republic in which we live. Can you parallel this happening? Do you realize this privilege? And what is asked of you latter day Cincinnatus? Attention, reverence, and an intelligent and scrupulous performance of the duty you owe to your Country, your Society and your ancesters, and I may add to yourself. I fear and I dislike to acknowledge it, but I greatly fear that a lack of knowledge which tends to chill realization is to blame for the lapse of devotion now and then in this State Society and elsewhere within the order at large. But, call to mind the remarkable proprietary interest which we rightful inheritors of Cincinnati membership hold in a fellowship founded upon and co-existent with this great Republic of which we are citizens. Do we appreciate the significance of this? I most respectfully maintain that members of the order of the Society of the Cincinnati, whose title thereto is complete and flawless, are in their own persons more closely identified with the birth and early nurture of this

great Republic than any other sentient being—and as such stand alone in all the confusion and multiplicity of patriotic societies and kindred movements of the present day. Do you think every member of this order realizes this fact as he ought? Do you believe that if these truths were taken to heart and believed as experiences in life are realized that there would be as much indifference in Society matters as there is? I know there would not be. And so in an attempt to awaken a live conception of our duties as members of this order and to outline what was transpiring when this wonderful Society was given life,—a life co-existent with the Government its founders helped to create, I have written this brief paper.

Brothers let us in our solitary hours dwell in memory upon the past, but emerging from this reflective mood let us bestir ourselves as active patriots. The chief negligence in Society matters is through non-attendance at meetings. I beg of you, gentlemen, to let nothing but death or serious illness or too great a distance stand between these meetings and yourselves. Your ancestor has pledged you to keep alive sentiments of patriotism, and you must obey these mandates if you are to be a worthy member of this Society. If you wish inspiration conjure up as by the wand of Wizardry, the last scenes at Yorktown, where our allies the Duc De Rochambeau and the beloved Lafayette, helped us to victory in the final scenes; going back a little let us call to mind Valley Forge and the blood-stained snow—stained with the blood of patriots.— Then we in New Jersey—brothers all, should call to mind, Princeton, Monmouth and above all,that "Unhappy affair at Trenton",these are scenes in which by an inverse scheme of representation we participated. Were we not nobly represented there in the thick of the conflict, with the liberties of individuals and the fate of nations at stake? How do we fulfill *our* duty as representatives of these noble sires in this year of grace 1911?

"The following principles shall be immutable and form the basis of the Society of the Cincinnati.

"An incessant attention to preserve inviolate those rights and liberties of human nature for which they have fought and bled, and without which the high rank of a rational being is a curse instead of a blessing.

"An unalterable determination to promote and cherish, between the respective States, that union and national honor so essentially necessary to their happiness, and the future dignity of the American Empire."

That is what is asked of us—is it much compared to what was done for us? Oh let there be a richly awakened interest in this great order, the noblest on earth, let us in New Jersey show to the Country and to each other, that the Divine spark still lives undimmed and undiminished and let there be no excuse for non-attendance at our meetings, so shall we go from strength to strength individually, and collectively, as members of the Society of the Cincinnati—and prove to all mankind the propriety of our beloved order and make its accomplishments for good evident unto all, thus justifying by our acts the intent of those glorious characters gone before, and fulfilling as men the duties so honorably entrusted to us.

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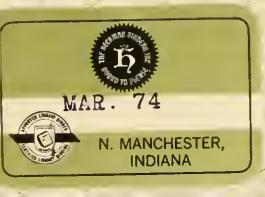
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